

News and updates for the licensee community from the Virginia Alcoholic Beverage Control Authority (ABC).

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 Virginia Alcoholic Beverage Control Authority 
LICENSEE

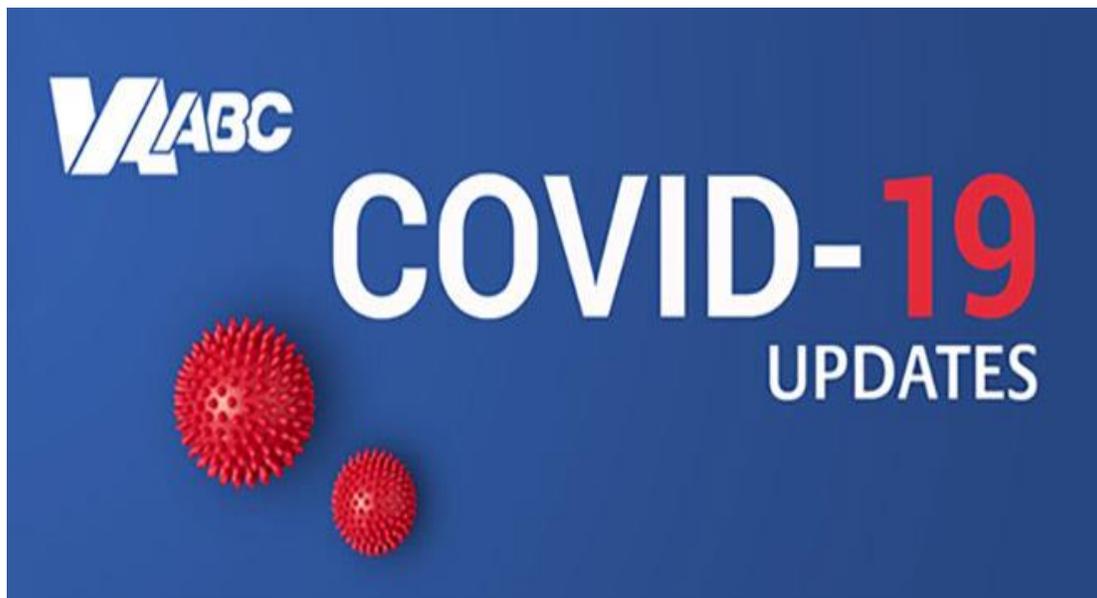
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COVID-19 Licensee Updates

The coronavirus crisis has caused a wave of changes to how Virginia ABC and ABC-licensed businesses operate. Governor Northam declared a state of emergency for the Commonwealth of Virginia on March 12, and during the ensuing weeks issued a number of Executive Orders in an effort to slow the spread of COVID-19.

One of these Orders limited the operations of non-essential restaurants and dining establishments, and banned gatherings of more than 10 people. This action severely impacted thousands of licensees.

In an effort to provide relief, the Northam administration worked with Virginia ABC to ease numerous regulations. Last month, the Governor directed Virginia ABC to defer licensee renewal fees for 90 days from original expiration date for establishments expiring in March, April, May and June. These deferrals will allow businesses to continue to operate without concern over choosing between keeping an employee and renewing a license.

The Governor also announced a major shift in policy so that restaurants with mixed beverage licenses and distilleries with approved tasting rooms are permitted to provide delivery services and take-out mixed drinks.

This temporary privilege seeks to support restaurants that have lost a substantial stream of revenue from the sale of mixed beverages and distilleries that have also been unable to provide their products to the public and suffered financial losses.

In order to maintain public safety, restrictions have been placed on the service of mixed beverages. Below are the highlights of the temporary regulation adjustment.

Distillery licensees are limited to a maximum of two mixed drinks per delivery or takeout order that contain 1½ ounces or less of spirits per drink.

Mixed beverage restaurants and limited mixed beverage restaurants are limited to four cocktails for each delivery or take out sale. Each order for delivery or takeout of cocktails must include a meal for every two cocktails purchased.

Cocktails shall be packaged in a glass, paper or plastic container (or similar disposable container) or in a single original metal can with a secure lid or cap designed to prevent consumption without removal of the lid or cap (lids with sipping holes or openings for straws are prohibited).

All recipients of delivery orders must be at least 21 years of age. A list of important FAQs regarding to-go cocktails can be found on [Virginia ABC's website](#).

The Governor restored restaurant's outdoor dining privileges May 15, permitting these businesses to operate at 50% occupancy. ABC created an accelerated process for receiving and approving requests for new or expanded outside dining areas.

For more updates on regulation modifications that impact breweries, wineries, distilleries, manufacturers, wholesalers and retail licensees, please visit the [Virginia ABC website](#).

Store Closures Due to COVID-19

In the interest of employee and customer safety, Virginia ABC found it prudent to reduce the operating hours of stores from noon-7 p.m. statewide.

Additionally, as store employees are exposed to the coronavirus, stores are closed for several days and professionally cleaned and sanitized.



In an abundance of caution, ABC closed numerous stores for several weeks in the Peninsula and Northern Virginia markets which experienced elevated cases of COVID-19, but these stores have been reopened.

ABC's Regional Enforcement offices in these areas remain closed to walk-in traffic, but are assisting customers via email and phone.

Any extended store closures related to the coronavirus pandemic will now be listed on [Virginia ABC's website](#).

License Reform Coming in 2021



Virginia ABC is proud to announce a new license and fee structure for ABC-licensed businesses. The streamlined structure, which will take effect July 1, 2021, consolidates 152 existing licenses down to 71, in a set of twelve categories.

The new legislation follows the General Assembly's passage of [HB 390](#) and [SB 389](#) which were signed into law by Governor Ralph Northam in April. Drafted by Virginia ABC, the legislation is the culmination of more than nine months of collaboration with industry stakeholders. The focus for ABC during this process was to ensure the proposed changes did not result in diminishing privileges for licensees. The resulting consolidation reduces complexity and duplicative processes for both licensees and Virginia ABC. Some privileges for similar businesses are standardized, and consistent qualification standards for similar businesses are implemented.

The new legislation also revises fees and changes to help fund the resources necessary to administer, monitor, and enforce these new licenses and privileges. These improvements will make it easier for industry participants to run their businesses as well as assist ABC's Bureau of Law Enforcement special agents in working with the regulated community.

Virginia's existing system for licensing and regulating alcohol was created 85 years ago. This new legislation is the first serious reform to streamline and simplify how beverage alcohol is regulated. The new license structure will work not just for ABC that manages licensees, but for the licensees and citizens of the Commonwealth whom ABC serves.

Stay tuned to future issues of this Licensee e-newsletter for more information on license reform and how these changes may impact your business.

Enter for a chance to win a VISA Gift Card!

ABC will give away three \$100 and four \$50 gift cards to seven current or new subscribers to the Licensee e-newsletter.

There are nearly 18,000 businesses licensed to sell or serve alcohol in the commonwealth. Yet only a small fraction of the thousands of employees who work in these restaurants, grocery and gourmet grocery stores, convenience stores, hotels and resorts, drug stores, wineries and breweries, beer and wine wholesalers and even bed and breakfast establishments have taken the one necessary step to ensure they have access to regular, reliable information that can benefit the daily operation of their business.

That step is subscribing to Virginia ABC's Licensee e-newsletter.

The Licensee e-newsletter is a compact email of brief articles geared toward owners, operators and employees of establishments that sell and serve alcoholic beverages. Information about legislative changes, available resources, training courses, violations and penalties, and education efforts is sent to subscribers in four quarterly issues.

In addition, the digital publication serves as a way for managers and servers

to stay up-to-date about operational and process changes within Virginia ABC that could affect licensee-related operations. Recently subscribers received additional messaging explaining ABC's actions to ease alcohol regulations in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

If Virginia's changing economic climate isn't reason enough to subscribe to ABC's official publication for licensees, then here's another—the chance to win a VISA gift card.

[Subscribe](#) to the Licensee e-newsletter before November 30 by visiting the Licensee page on Virginia ABC's website and you'll be automatically entered in ABC's Subscriber Sweepstakes.

Training Opportunities for Licensees

National Alcohol Awareness Month was observed in April. ABC used this observance to provide the public an opportunity to learn more about issues related to alcohol use. While licensees are experiencing unprecedented conditions due to the COVID-19 response, it is important to remain aware of the impact of alcohol consumption. Consider using this time to ensure servers and managers are knowledgeable about safe and responsible alcohol service.

Although all classroom training has been suspended because of COVID-19, Responsible Sellers and Servers: Virginia's Program (RSVP) training and Managers' Alcohol Responsibility Training (MART) are [still available online](#) for free and can assist businesses in shouldering their many responsibilities for maintaining a safe and regulated operation even in the midst of a pandemic.

At Home Shipping Initiative

Virginia ABC is currently partnering with UPS to test the shipping of spirits, Virginia wines and mixers directly to customers' homes. This initiative is a priority for Virginia ABC, both in response to COVID-19 and as a way of meeting customer needs and expectations.

Currently, home shipping is not available to licensees. However, Virginia ABC is actively working to assess delivery options for licensees.

Virginia ABC will provide updates in future communications as more information on delivery options for licensees becomes available.

ABC's Online License System is Coming!

You've been reading about this initiative for months, and although the summer rollout has been postponed, Virginia ABC's new online portal for licensees will still be launched as a new service for ABC-licensed businesses in the future.

The online portal will be the result of ABC's transition to a paperless records system. Users will create a unique account login and password to gain entry to this secure licensee portal where they can apply for a license, manage and renew existing licenses, pay fines and fees, as well as view hearing dates and payment history. Licensees will be able to set their own hours for transacting ABC business—when and where it's convenient—at the place of business, at home, during the day or after closing for the night.

Virginia ABC is your business partner that's ready to work when you are.

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ZERO TOLERANCE POLICY FOR UNDERAGE SALES AND CONSUMPTION

Whether you are a new licensee or a seasoned establishment professional, we cannot stress enough your important role in the community. The selling and serving of alcoholic beverages is a business that is subject to higher legal and social accountability than almost any other industry. As a licensee, you are responsible for maintaining a safe, regulated business and shoulder many responsibilities, including preventing underage sales and consumption of alcoholic beverages. Virginia ABC has a strict "zero tolerance" policy for underage consumption and looks to you to aggressively avoid these sales. [Read more about avoiding underage sales](#)

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